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ABSTRACT

Many countries throughout the world have developed programs to encourage parents to become more involved in their children's schools and education. In Turkey, the importance of parent involvement has been recognized only recently. The parental involvement program initiated in TED Ankara College in Ankara is Turkey's first Kindergarten and primary school parental involvement program. The program, which features a blend of written materials, meetings, and parent participation in schools and classes is conducted at three levels as follows: level 1 (weekly bulletins, open class); level 2 (panolar, letters to parents and children, communication notebooks, monthly curriculum summaries, home programs, monthly brochures); and level 3 (volunteer parents for school activities, parents as assistant teachers, parents as resource persons, meetings with parents). Parents have credited the program with equipping them with parenting skills, facilitating their understanding of their children's development, and improving their attitudes toward school. Teachers have praised the program for strengthening their relationship with students' families and creating common ground for communicating with students and parents. Studies have shown that, by helping to empower parents, parent involvement programs have helped parents (especially women) with their own development, their children's development, and their community's development. (Contains 10 references.) (MN)

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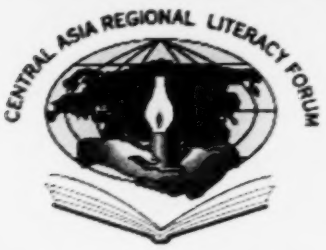

Parental involvement in the educational system: To empower parents to become more knowledgable and effective

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The role of parents in the educational system and Parental Involvement Programs:

In the development of children, the impact of the social environment and community are very significant. The child's behavior is determined by some other factors which are home environment, school and the community. Within the family, parents are seen as the primary agents of socialization,influencing the child both directly and indirectly. Families are considered as the major influence on their child's behavior and development. Families have a primary responsibility for their children's development and well-being; On the other hand, they need resources and support that will enable them to fulfill that responsibility effectively. In other words, parents are needed to be supported to develop various life skills, so that they become well equipped to deal with the demands of parenting and various roles in the society. The concept of functional literacy, (Unesco,1993) empowering the individuals with the life long skills to cope with the demands of their present circumstances for effective functioning in their family and in the community has been the philosophy beyond the parental involvement programs.

There should be a partnership between the teachers, the administrators, the family and the community. It is not easy for a teacher to contribute a child without total support from the family and the entire community. We need to realize that community working together is more valuable than its individual components working alone.(Ibara, 1997).When the parents are involved in their children's education, they may have an opportunity to express their views as part of the formal assesment process to meet the needs of the learning process. They can also provide information about their child to help teachers.

The importance of building a partnership in education is becoming more widely recognized. When there is a successful coordination between community and parents, this helps the children to become more competent scholars and more productive and responsible citizens. To achieve this coordination, parental involvement(PI) programs have been initiated in the educational process. PI means a close working partnership between parents and teachers which enables both to bring their unique insights and experience to the point task of educating children and via empowering them. Often parens become involved on behalf of their own offspring

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and then get drawn into a wider sphere of activity (OECD,1997). PI programs have the aim of empowering parents to take a proactive role in the education and development of their children and to improve their children's educational achievement. Moreover, PI seems to contribute to the quality of the educational process and enhances the child's development. Several studies explored the effects of parental involvement in the educational setting. In a study, Fehrmann, Keith, Reimers (1987) investigated that parental involvement does have an important direct effect on grades, and parents might help their children achieve higher grades through monitoring the children's daily activities by keeping close track of how they are doing in school. There also some other advantages of this program for the students. Students become more successful when they know that their parents are interested in and committed to their success in education throughout the schooling process (Johnson and Johnson,1994). On the other hand, teachers also benefit from parental involvement by sharing the responsibility of educating their children. Moreover, due to the cultural differences, many parents are not familiar with the expectations of their children's school and do not understand how to go about getting involved even if they want to. They need to be informed about the societal and educational rules, regulations and values.

.When parents participate in the educational process, they enrich the academic, social and emotional development of their children and helps parents to develop positive attitudes toward school (Kaiser,1997). As the relationship and the experiences between the students, teachers, parents, administrators and all other related parties develop and the school settings become more meaningful learning environments, we may expect to have more effectively and productively functioning students (Akkök, A?kar, Sucuo?lu, 1995).

Applications in several countries:

Parents in many OECD countries want to become involved in their children's schooling and understand the educational process more fully. For example, in Canada, parents are highly involved in school activities, they tape books for children who can not read, come to school to speak to students and teachers on several topics. Schools use technology in communicating with the parents by providing electronic newletters to parents. In England, parents are encouraged to help their children's learning both at home and mostly at school. Parent participation in France, is provided through the parents' associations. In Germany, parents are expected to provide support at home for school activities by supervising homework and helping to organize extra-curricular activities.

Ways to involve parents:

Since the parental involvement programs play an important role in the educational process, the ways to involve parents are also important. Some ways to involve parents are conducting parenting skills seminars, having regular meetings to discuss curriculum, teaching parents how to help their kids with home study and home activities, encouraging parents to educate themselves and providing opportunities for students and parents to learn together. Some other recommendations for more active involvement can be listed as regular, two-way meaningful communication between home and school, promotion and support of parenting skills, active participation in

student learning, parents as volunteer parents in schools and parents as full partners in school decisions that affect children and families. Riley(1994) indicated that parents can take a more active role in their children's education by; discussing regularly with children their classroom activities and listening to their explanations of what has been learned, providing a time for helping homework assignments, taking advantage of opportunities to visit classes, and engaging with their children model building acitivities that use a variety of academic and social skills.

Initiation of Parental Involvement Programs in Turkey:

In our educational system, the importance of PI has been very recently recognized. A longitudinal study was conducted by Ka?_tç_ba?_ (1991) over a period of 4 years for preschol children on the effects of parent training on the students' academic and social performance. Parents were educated and involved in the educational process of their children. The preschool children whose mothers were trained became more successful and they have develop more positive attitudes toward school and well adapted to the educational process than the control group.

Our study Akkök, Kökdemir, Ö?etürk, 1998) is the first parental involvement program that has developed and conducted at the kindergarden (Anaokulu) and primary school level in Turkey. Thus has a pioneeering importance. This program has been initiated in TED Ankara College in Ankara with the first graders and their parents and extended to the second grade parents this year. Also, in another school in Ankara, METU kindergarden and primary school, the PI programs have been conducted for a term period.

Our basic starting intention was to promote parent participation and develop a model of parental involvement programs for Turkish educational system.We have developed some strategies to involve more parents, tried to reach a shared understanding between administrators, teachers, parents and counselors of what form parent involvement will take, provided parents information on the school and the ways of getting involved. Assessing the needs of the parents before starting the program was our priority..

Procedure

Our program has been conducted at three levels from a simpler level activities to more complex. The program is a blend of written materials, meetings and parental participation in school and classes.

First level of activities:

Weekly bulletins

Open class

Second level of activities:

Panolar

Letters to parents and children

Communication notebooks

Monthly curriculum summaries

Home programs

Monthly brochures

Third level of activities:

Volunteer parents for school activities

Being an Assistant teacher

Being a resource person

Meetings with parents

The written materials were prepared by the teachers and the counselors. A questionnaire was administered to parents and the teachers asking their opinions about the activities an their suggestions at the end of the first term and at the end of the year.

General discussion

Parents indicated that the program has equipped them with parenting skills, facilitated their understanding of their children's development. and influenced their attitudes toward school positively. Moreover, parents stated that this program has created a 'common culture" in the school. In other words, helped the families to acquire certain skills and helped them to communicate these with other families. As the parents get empowered to develop better life skills, they get drawn into wider spheres of activities, therefore, PI programs are perceived as programs helping parents,especially, women, for their own development , their children's development and the community development (OECD,1997).

The teachers indicated that their relationship with the families have been strenghtened and this has created a common ground for communicating with the children and their parents. They stated that their job was facilitiated by the program".

Through the PI programs conducted, we were able to bring the parents, teacher, administrators,counselors and families together, encouraging positive interactions and support,gathering parents together to share experiences and contribute to some of the programs of the PI. The outcomes indicated that parents became more involved in their children's education, volunteered more to work in the school, and the collaboration between the teachers, counselors and parents developed significantly. Parents started to participate in the school activities more,and developed a better understanding of the school and the system.

Although, there are so many ways to involve parents, there is no one best way for schools to get parents effectively engaged in the achievement of their children. Each school and its community will have to develop, test and refine their own strategies.

When parents are involved, communication between home and school improves, students learn that parents and school are a team. As one parent pointed out"Without communication, understanding is impossible, without understanding, conflicts are probable". Furthermore, helping parents to acquire various skills, is perceived as a significant tool for adult development, thus supporting the community's development.. ,

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